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PublicEye

By Cara DeGette

A club for good old boys

It would be terrific to know the extent to which the city's largest public school district relied on the "expertise" of Focus on the Family and other anti-gay groups in a lawsuit seeking recognition of a Gay-Straight Alliance at Palmer High School.

It would be just great to know why they are shelling out taxpayer money at a rate of an estimated $250 an hour to their attorney who just happens to be a Christian evangelical with close ties to Focus on the Family — to battle said Gay-Straight Alliance.

Unfortunately, District 11 isn't saying much. The lawsuit, filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on the behalf of several Palmer students, is designed to force the district to recognize a club that would provide a safe place for students to meet and learn about issues related to sexual orientation.

According to D-11 spokeswoman **Elaine Naleski**. "We have no comment at this time because of the ongoing trial."

Last week, an e-mail and response alluding to Focus on the Family's involvement in the battle against the gay club was introduced into evidence in district court in Denver. Written last Feb. 11, Board President **Sandy Shakes** asked the following of Superintendent **Norm Ridder**:

"I have heard talk about Focus on the Family or other organizations that may help with the legal fees, where are we on that issue? When will we discuss this or get information of substance?" Shakes wrote.

Three days later, on Valentine's Day, Ridder submitted the following response:

"As we discussed on the trip to Tampa, I have met with Mark (sic) Fey and **Mike Haley** from Focus on the Family. They are working with [our attorney] Stuart [Lark] on the Palmer case. Mark (sic) Fey mentioned that at a recent convention sponsored by the Gay-Straight Alliance Organization that Orange County and Colorado Springs has (sic) been targeted because of their christian (sic) fundamental (sic) positions."

"We have no comment at this time ..."

In court last week, Ridder testified that District 11 never paid Focus on the Family for legal help. However, nobody has asked him the size or the scope of Focus' involvement — or any other religious group for that matter. And, at least until the trial is over, Ridder is unavailable to explain how the district came to turn to a Christian ministry for legal advice to deny a club for gay students. But in the meantime, we can take a look at the players involved.

First, **Marc Fey** is the education policy analyst for Focus on the Family. To get an idea of where Mr. Fey is coming from, last year he wrote a glowing review of a book whose title is *Reclaim Your School: 10 Steps to Practically and Legally Evangelize Your School.*

Next meet Mike Haley, manager of the Homosexuality and Gender Issues department at Focus on the Family, which maintains that homosexuals can be "cured." He is also chairman of the board of Exodus International, which promotes the idea that being gay is a choice, and the wrong one at that.

Finally, there's **Stuart Lark**, a partner at Holme, Roberts & Owen, whose Web site lists his areas of specialty as health care, nonprofit organizations and religious organizations — but not education. In 2002, Lark took a year-long leave of absence to work for the Washington D.C.-based Christian Legal Society. He currently is the chairman of the board of the Colorado Springs chapter of the Christian Management Association, whose mission is "to equip our member organizations with management information, leadership training and strategic networking relationships so ministries are led and managed in God-honoring ways." At least one other board member of the networking group is from Focus on the Family.

All of these men are probably perfectly nice people. But with all due respect, why in the heck have school district officials allowed a taxpayer-supported entity to be manipulated by a group with a clear conflict?

This week, District 11 board member **Karen Teja** had this answer. "I'm appalled we would seek assistance from Focus on the Family," she said. "If the majority of the board feels the district has the right for litigation, we should seek it on our own merits versus involving special interests."

Perhaps the district should consider a guide on gay clubs that was prepared by the National School Board Association, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers — and was recently distributed to every school board and high school principal in the country. There are currently nearly 3,000 student Gay-Straight Alliance clubs across the country — including 65 in Colorado. **Joshua Lamont**, a spokesman for the national Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN), pointed out that courts across the country have ruled in favor of such clubs.

Quite frankly [District 11] could save a lot in legal fees if they read that document," Lamont said.

It might be too late for that.

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Ellie,
Stuart Lark is the guy Greg B. had lunches with

VillageTurns

eling show

r with the dates of the ome Show, a dazzling unveil the latest cutting- advancements in floor

ple, I discovered Miracle believably clean floors mage of the Virgin Mary

nanufacturer really pushed Mop, which cleaned my s crossword and corrected (Sadly, Smart Mop has become Depressed Mop since Dec. 20, 2004, when he was watching CNN and heard President George Bush, in an actual speech in Fort Belvoir, Va., say: "And so, during these holiday seasons, we thank our blessings.")

Anyway, in my quest to stay current on mop technology, I got up early last Saturday and headed for our village's seventh annual Home Show.

Sadly, I didn't find any new mops. So, until Smart Mop snaps out of his funk, I'll have to clean my house the old-fashioned way: spraying End Dust on ing him across the floor. wever, find Jai (it's pro- t to make any jokes about e stars of *Queer Eye For* w in which five gay men le, wardrobe and cultural n such as me. nkly, the whole idea of g tips made me laugh so n my orange and green nb my mullet.)

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the Phil Long Expo Cen- on the north end of town, s of Focus on the Family. cast member from *Queer* have enrolled him in nversion program, or

er in the day by local ribed as the TV show's his nickname in the first n drinking a cabernet cled him until the guy

luejais at my bird feeder) ation at 12:30 p.m. before of some 250 people in the ea."

opping the show at one a big guy wearing a plaid, t.

Fashion-challenged man: "No."

Jai: "You should get one."

He said the homes or apartments of all single, heterosexual men smell like dirty feet and they should, at least once a day, give the place a "Lysol spritz." (If I understood him correctly, if you do the Lysol spritz on a regular basis you don't have to wash your feet.)

PG-13 rating

Anyway, the 50-minute presentation was entertaining and informative. As you might imagine, however, some of the villagers around here weren't all that happy about having a *Queer Eye* guy at our home show. Villager Laurel Hill, for example, expressed her anger in a long letter to the editor published last Friday in the *Gazette* (motto: "Throwing The Word of God Down Your Driveway and Under Your Car, Just Like the Apostles Did").

Here now, some actual excerpts from Ms. Hill's letter:

"Should I have to explain to my children what or who the 'Queer Eye' guy is?" she asked in the letter.

The answer, of course, is no. She should not have to explain it to her children. I just hope she doesn't come crying to us when her kids are in their 30s and don't know a pillow sham from a duvet.

"I think," Ms. Hill continued in her letter, "people who want to take their families out to try to find ways to improve their homes should not necessarily have to expose themselves to the gay lifestyle."

I couldn't agree more. Especially on a day like last Saturday, when it was 18 degrees with a brisk north wind.

Ms. Hill went on to write: "Some of us never thought a home show would be something we would have to think about giving a PG-13 rating or having to give our children a 'celebrate diversity' talk beforehand."

I think all of us who are parents know how difficult that "celebrate diversity" talk can be — especially if the little bastards start asking a lot of questions and make Mommy and Daddy late for the Monster Truck Pull.

Laurel's letter also said: "I thought a home show was about windows, floors, painting techniques and decorating, not the gay lifestyle."

Give the place a "Lysol spritz."

Earth to Laurel: Windows, floors, painting techniques and decorating IS the gay lifestyle. Throw in 120 pairs of perfectly folded socks and you've got the whole thing covered.

More from the angry letter: "Sponsors should pick more appropriate guests. I don't care what cable TV thinks all of America wants. Sometimes it's just carpeting and paint and a way to make a better home for our children."

Yup. Carpeting and paint.

That oughta do it.

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